Mixed Methods Approaches

Evaluation Division
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)
U.S. Department of State

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Overview

- Program evaluations in the Evaluation Division
 - Consist of outcome evaluations
 - Are retrospective and encompass cross-cutting themes
 - Incorporate case studies to highlight findings
 - Provide data for program planning and goal setting
- Why we use a mixed-method approach
- Examples of what we gain by applying this methodology





Strong belief that mixed-methods are the best choice for us

- Rigor
 - Based on research and debate in the evaluation community
- Wide variability in our programs
 - Across programs
 - Within a given program
- We work in a space of complexity given the nature of our mission in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)
- We do not see the evaluation of the 'counter-factual' as the only way to examine program effectiveness





Our Environment and Constraints on Use of Experimental Designs like a RCT

Requirements or Considerations	Our environment
Attribution	We do not seek to attribute impact to particular elements of an intervention
	Focus of our programs generally has a reach beyond participants
Effect Size	We are interested in comprehensive change
Randomization	Purposeful selection of change agents in many of our programs
	No tracking of those not accepted to the program
Resources	Limited Funding and time





We work in a space of complexity

- Our programs are varied and complex in terms of activities
- Our participant outcomes are complex
 - Transformative and/or life long change
 - Challenges and solutions are multi-dimensional
 - Interacting factors that produce change





ongoing evaluation - investing in change agents to impact communities

- Primary goal to invest in change agents and support them to bring about change in their home communities and organizations
- Program is ongoing for 20+ years and reaches various countries
- Features of the program:
 - Selection based on professional/personal accomplishments, motivation to serve the public good and identified need in home country
 - Intensive, individualized program for talented mid-career individuals from various fields of expertise
 - One year exchange (academic and work) in the US then return to home country to implement project(s)





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- Complexity of the program activities
 - Components that are the same
 - Components that are different
- Complexity of the outcomes
 - Transformative and/or life long change
 - Challenges and solutions are multi-dimensional
 - Interacting factors that produce change





What we are interested in

Capturing

- What program participants are doing and how they are doing it
- Who program participants are interacting with (engaged with)
- Various aspects of the experience
 - Professional, Personal, Interpersonal
- Features and reach of enabling environments

Identifying

- The mechanisms that lead to change and sustain it
- How participant networks (professional and personal) have changed or expanded
- How attitudes, behaviors or beliefs have changed
- Sets of outcomes





How We Use Qualitative Assessment – Discovery

- Document program variation
 - How the program plays out in the targeted areas
 - How the program looks on the ground across sites
 - Mechanisms through which program has an impact
 - Institutions / individuals who influence how the program implemented
- Understand or identify cultural variation
 - Socials norms that guide decision making, behaviors and attitudes
- To move from ideal types and theories of change toward nuanced understandings of change and a concrete face of change
 - We have a good sense of what change will look like and how it will occur
 - Field work is used to develop complexities of types and discover new aspects of types





How We Use Qualitative Assessment - Define and Interpret

- Develop standardized survey instruments
 - Develop survey modules
 - Construct appropriate survey questions
 - Construct meaningful and inclusive response categories
- Further understand /interpret data from our standardized surveys
 - Open ended responses
 - Patterns in the data (across sites, at one site, among participant cohorts)
- Identify clear program outcomes
- Understand factors that will impact program effects
 - Interfering events/ trends in the country
 - What naturally occurs in participants lives/careers over time



Quantitative Methods in our work

- We use surveys to collect data on a broad array of topics
 - Program specific
 - Topics common to programs in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)
- We strive to survey all participants in a program (we do not sample)
 - a great deal of effort is spent locating participants
- We use the survey to report on findings across participants;
 examples:
 - General characteristics
 - Prevalent attitudes and behaviors
 - Self-reports of changes in attitudes and behaviors
 - What they are doing
 - How they are reaching out to others in their communities to share what they have learned
 - Organizational and institutional change



Evaluation of the Global Connections and Exchanges Program

- Program Office wanted to understand outcome of virtual exchanges and the outcomes of various program models
- Series of programs designed to integrate access to the Internet with cutting edge approaches to teaching via project-based, collaborative learning in secondary schools in developing countries
- Primary features of the program :
 - Construction of new centers or enhancement of existing school internet centers
 - Training of teachers and center coordinators
 - In-person exchanges within regions, across regions
 - Student activities with community components
 - On-line resources and extensive networks
- Programs have multiple goals country, regional, multi-regional
 - 18 countries in the program





Global Connections and Exchange Program in Armenia

- Largest of the Programs
 - Wide Coverage
 - Network accounts for 25% of all secondary schools in Armenia
- Oldest of the programs in Eurasia
 - Operating 10 years at time of evaluation
- Internet Connectivity Centers (ICC)
 - Program selection based on schools
 - Provision of equipment and internet connectivity
 - Center open from 10am 5pm, 2 hours to community
- Training of ICC coordinators and teachers
- National website with resources available to all schools in network





What our evaluation revealed about program and outcome variations in Armenia

• Qualitative Assessment revealed variation in the program on the ground

Access to the Internet Centers

- Case A: Center is open to all students in the school
- Case B: Center access is limited to select students

Student 's interface with center varies: through a coordinator, a teacher or both

- This results in different types of program activities
 - Classroom based activities
 - Skill based activities

Online survey data revealed different types of outcomes

- Student skills
- Educational reform how teachers use the centers





Global Connections and Exchange Program in Lebanon

- Has been a catalyst and guide for programs in North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia
- Connected schools
 - Selection of teachers in public and private schools to reach students
 - Training of teachers 4 week course; on-line workshops
 - Teachers mentor other teachers
 - One week reciprocal teacher exchange (Lebanon/US) which involves a community service project
 - Program generally occurs after school hours
- Virtual conferences, on-line courses, on-line community projects
- Two regional in-person workshops (one in Beirut)
- Access to worldwide online network





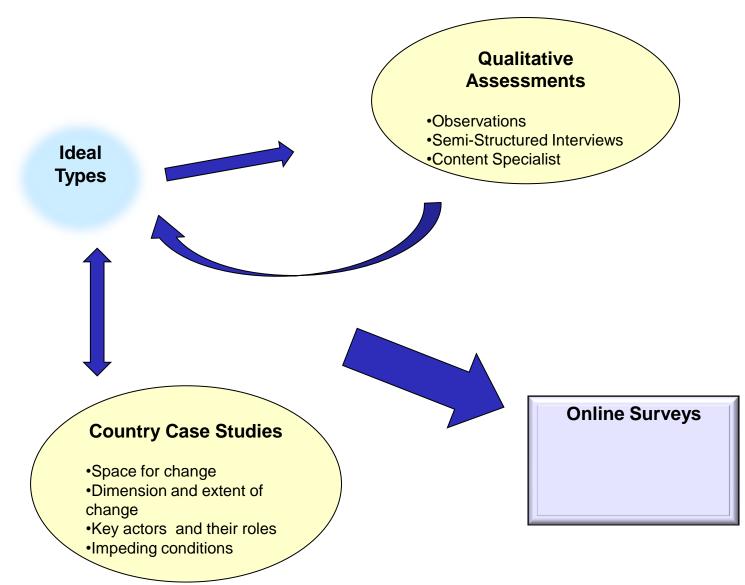
What our evaluation revealed about similarities in outcomes across sites

• Qualitative assessments revealed:

- Participation in the program changed how teachers and students perceive their roles in the classroom
- English language skills of students improved even in the absence of any project- based activity focus on English - due to very nature of the internet
- Online survey data showed:
 - Students report introducing new ideas and knowledge in some programs they report introducing new ways of doing things
 - Students report improvement in their English language skills in programs with no focus on English language instruction



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